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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SPEAKER DEBUTS HIPLIFE DOCUMENTARY TO WIDE GHANAIAN AUDIENCE

1. Summary. From February 17-26, 2005, post sponsored a series of film screenings across Ghana of a PAS-funded documentary that described links between Ghanaian hiplife artists and the United States. The film showings were part of post's African American History Month celebrations. Post used I-Bucks to bring out the documentary filmmaker, a former Fulbright researcher in Ghana, Dr. Jesse Shipley, who introduced his film to enthusiastic audiences at two state-run universities, the British Council and the residence of Ambassador Mary C. Yates in Accra. The film screenings were enhanced by the presence of local hiplife artists, who performed and/or answered questions about their music and told of the impact U.S. rap music had had on them. End Summary.

2. The documentary was first shown at the University for Development Studies-Nyampala campus, in the predominantly-Muslim Northern Region, near Tamale. Nearly 200 students showed up and stayed to watch the one-hour film despite a series of technical problems that threatened to disrupt the event.

Some members of the audience jumped from their chairs and danced when the film was followed by a live performance by Big Adams, a Ghanaian hiplife artist, who sang and strutted across a makeshift stage.

3. Dr. Shipley's film, entitled "Living the Hiplife: Reggie Rockstone and Ghanaian Popular Culture", uses interviews with younger hiplife musicians, disc jockeys and record producers to show how the well-known singer, Reggie Rockstone, became known as the "godfather" of hiplife music. One record producer in the film is Rab Bakari, who grew up in New York and who helped Reggie Rockstone develop his unique music style. In the film, Mr. Bakari said that when he first met the musician and his group in 1994, as he put it, "I thought I was listening to rappers from Brooklyn." He worked with Reggie to produce an album, which featured mostly songs in English. However, before its release, Reggie's father urged his son to tailor the album more toward an African audience, so Reggie added two songs in Akan-Twi, and the album took off, creating hiplife, Ghanaian style. In the film, Mr. Rockstone said he believes his music became popular in the mid-1990s with Ghanaian audiences because, "I sounded and dressed like a kid they'd seen in a N.Y. video, but then I'd sing in (Akan) Twi."

4. Reggie Rockstone, who still performs, but also produces records for younger artists, attended both the screening at the British Council for an audience of 80 students, music buffs and cultural figures and for guests at the Ambassador's residence. Dr. Shipley and the artist explained that hiplife music is a fusion of Ghanaian languages and U.S. hip-hop music. The Ambassador was enthusiastic about the film and its portrayal of this segment of the youth population that she has recommended it to the President and shared a copy with the Foreign Minister.

5. Following the successful showing at the British Council, Dr. Shipley, CAO and Cultural Affairs Specialist, travelled to Kumasi, Ghana's second

largest city, for a screening at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Despite suffering a severe bout of malaria on the eve of his talk at KNUST, (he was hospitalized for 12 hours), Dr. Shipley went ahead the next day with his talk before an audience of 700 KNUST students and faculty. Again, post sponsored a performance after the film by a nationally-known singer, Obuor, who is Kumasi-born. Several students were so taken by the performance that they ascended the stage to dance alongside the singer. Several members of the audience, including professors, said they were thrilled because they had never seen Obuor in person, only on television.

16. Results of the film screenings, talks by Dr. Shipley, live performances and interaction with the hiplife artists were outstanding, with the programs reaching hundreds of university and high school students and promoting greater mutual understanding. Post received a message from Dr. Shipley saying the trip was amazing, and had given him opportunities he had never had before.

17. Post greatly appreciates the support of IIP and ECA for their assistance in arranging this speaker program featuring Dr. Shipley, and looks forward to building upon this effort to engage younger audiences for PAS programs.

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